

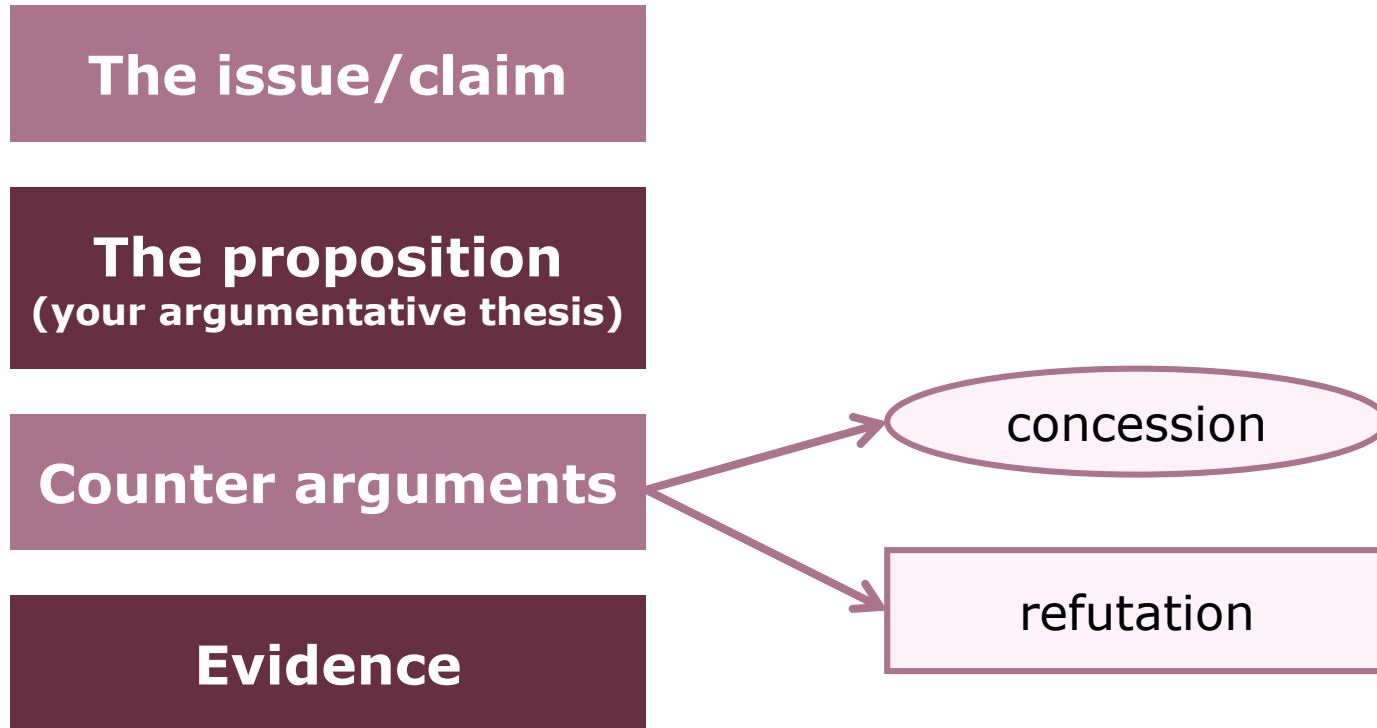
Understanding essay types

Argumentative essays

The nature of argumentative essays

- In an argumentative essay, you agree or disagree with an **issue**. An issue is a subject that people have different opinions about.
- You have to argue from a point of view – this is your **argumentative thesis**.
- You need to support your thesis with **logical reasoning** and **evidence** to make your arguments convincing.

The anatomy of an argument



The issue/claim

The issue is usually a contentious one; that is, it is arguable.

Examples:

Are single sex schools better than mixed schools?

"John Lennon is the greatest musician of all time". Write an argumentative essay to support or disclaim this statement.

"The TV effect is a myth." How far do you agree with this statement?

"The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits." Is Milton Friedman right?

The proposition

(argumentative thesis)

In university essay assignments, the proposition may be given:

Write an essay in support of this claim/statement.

OR, it may be left open:

How far do you agree or disagree with the statement?

In this case, you will have to establish your thesis or point of view on the issue in the introduction. A thesis in the introduction helps to prepare the reader for the arguments in the body of the essay. An introduction without a thesis may prompt this response from the reader: "OK, but what is your argument?"

Argumentative thesis statements

A thesis is NOT simply saying that you agree or disagree with something. You will have to be more specific than that. Study the following examples:

Instead of

Beethoven is the most important composer of his time

A woman's principal place is in the home.

Better:

Beethoven is widely regarded as the most important composer of his time for his innovative and revolutionary approach to musical compositions, his musical craftsmanship, and his enduring influence on the history of music.

Despite the freedom that women today enjoy, it is the contention of this essay that a woman's principal place is in the home

Counterarguments

By definition, arguments are subject to challenge. You must seem to be fair and reasonable. Therefore, there should be aspects of concession and refutation when building each argument.

Concession (the view opposite to yours) discusses the opposing arguments. Usually, you begin your argument with a concession.

Refutation (your view) discusses your counter arguments in which you point out what is wrong or unreasonable about the opposite view. It supports your original thesis.

Example

Concession

Although Beethoven's music of the early period is sometimes described as imitative of Mozart and Haydn, ...

Refutation

... much of it is startlingly original, especially the works for piano...

(the rest of the paragraph builds on this point, i.e. providing evidence of original piano pieces)

More examples

Concession

It is true that Beethoven did not invent the motif development and sonata form; he inherited it from Haydn and Mozart, ...

Refutation

but he greatly extended them, writing longer and more ambitious movements. In other words, he ...

Concession

Compared to the output of Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven's number of compositions is relatively small.

Refutation

However, piece by piece, note by note, they stand as the greatest body of music ever composed.

What evidence?

- Primary evidence from source documents
- Analyses of research and studies
- Other people's expert opinions
- Your expert opinions (especially in Fine Arts Studies, eg, Music, art, painting.)

Organisation of argumentative essays: two possible patterns

Block Pattern

(suitable for shorter essays)

INTRODUCTION Explanation of the issue, thesis and key arguments

BODY

Block 1

- A. Summary of other side's arguments
- B. Refutation of first argument
- C. Refutation of second argument
- D. Refutation of third argument

Block 2

- E. Your first argument
- F. Your second argument
- G. Your third argument

CONCLUSION

Point-by-Point Pattern

(suitable for longer essays)

INTRODUCTION Explanation of the issue, thesis and key arguments

BODY

- A. Argument 1: concession and refutation
- B. Argument 2: concession and refutation
- C. Argument 3: concession and refutation

CONCLUSION